

Chapter 9

Virtual Community Engagement to Advance Interoperability in Digital Health

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide an overview of InfoCentral, a virtual community platform launched for advancing digital health information in Canada. Developed and hosted by Canada Health Infoway, InfoCentral has become a hub and resource for stakeholders in digital health to discuss, consider, and evaluate common challenges among digital health system compatibility across the country (i.e., interoperability). A synopsis of the role Infoway contributes toward advancing Canadian digital health, the background and considerations for InfoCentral, along with a series of three flourishing virtual community case studies will be examined. Critical success factors and lessons learned in establishing, supporting and growing productive virtual communities conclude this chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Canada faces a unique challenge in the area of digital health. With the delivery of health care primarily the responsibility of Canada's provinces and territories, it falls under their individual mandates to support health care providers with information technology solutions that enable the effective sharing of information across care settings. Although each region shares the same goal of providing quality health care supported by effective digital health solutions, they may differ in prioritizing, procuring and implementing solutions. This variance has often led to incompatibility among systems, regions and provinces. Though there has been progress in proliferating digital health systems across the country, the connectivity, information flow and standardization, often referred to as interoperability, remains a significant challenge. With this challenge in mind, an initiative has been underway in Canada to bring together the vast array of players in digital health to ensure these issues are addressed. Under the guidance of the Digital Health Alliance managed by Canada Health Infoway, stakeholders representing provincial, territorial and regional governments, digital health vendors, clinicians and citizens have convened collaboration efforts primarily coordinated through an online platform called InfoCentral.

This chapter will provide an overview and rationale of this unique application of virtual community engagement as it applies to the digital health landscape of health care delivery in Canada. This chapter will include background information about Canada Health Infoway, its role in digital health development in Canada, and the launch of the Clinical Interoperability Action Plan in 2015. An overview of the InfoCentral collaboration environment will be provided, along with a discussion of the engagement tactics and critical success factors to moving collaboration forward on the platform. Finally, this chapter will discuss three case studies representing communities and working groups hosted on InfoCentral, citing key success factors impacting this online community.

BACKGROUND

About Canada Health Infoway

Canada Health Infoway's purpose is to realize the vision of healthier Canadians through innovative digital health solutions. Through targeted investments, Infoway helps deliver better quality and access to care and more efficient delivery of health services for patients and clinicians as a product of collaborative relationships with federal, provincial and territorial governments, clinicians, industry and Canadians.

In September 2000, Canada's Health Ministers made a commitment to "work together to strengthen a Canada-wide health infostructure to improve quality, access and timeliness of health care for Canadians." In response to this commitment, Infoway was created in 2001 to accelerate the development and implementation of electronic health information systems across the country, partnering with each province and territory in pursuit of a common goal.

A creation of Canada's federal government, Canada Health Infoway was established as an independent, not-for-profit corporation. The organization is accountable to the 14 Deputy Ministers of Health of the federal, provincial and territorial governments, known as the Members of the Corporation. In addition to these members, Infoway also has an independent Board of Directors, which is made up of leaders from Canada's public, health, legal, financial and technology sectors.

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